

4H clubs for youth

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One Saturday afternoon in April, the sky over Mount Kilimanjaro held back its masika long rains as the newly formed Utamaduni 4H club took to the make-shift stage among the lush green of the Kinukamori Waterfalls in Marangu. With their satirical comedy and dances they held the audience spell bound.

This was an occasion to celebrate the inauguration of a container-turned office which will serve the thirteen 4H clubs of Marangu of which 12 are for day secondary students of villages in Rauya, Himo, Samanga, Sembeti, Lyambrikana, Lyasongoro, Arisi, Ashira, Mshiri, Mamba, Kyala, Kilemapofu and one, Utamaduni, for youths out of school.

4H clubs are recognized world over by the four-leafed clover emblem, each leaf standing for “**H**ead for clear thinking, **H**ear for loyalty, **H**ands for service, and **H**ealth for better living.”

The club was founded in the United States about one century ago. Its origin had an agricultural base. While older farmers were uninterested in new farming methods and reluctant to take risks, the younger ones were found to be receptive and eager to try out the new.

Youth became the channel through which 4H clubs disseminated new agricultural technology. Now the scopes of their activities are limited only by the imagination and creativity of club members.

Since their founding, 4H clubs have spread to over 80 countries around the world. It landed on Tanzanian shores in Tanga in 1993. Since then the number of clubs in Tanzania has grown to some 470 with about 35,000 youths aged 10 to 25.

Our youths, as youths everywhere, need constructive outlets for their energy to keep them occupied during their spare time, to steer them away from bad company and bad habits like alcohol and drugs that could rob them of their future. Mwl. Marinja, Adviser to the 4H clubs of Marangu, is especially concerned for day secondary students and youths out of school who have much free time at hand. He wants to get them involved in sports such as football and netball leagues and in community service. He believes that through these activities youths would learn sportsmanship and improve their social and leadership skills.

Under his guidance, all 4H club members of Marangu are encouraged to undertake income-generating activities, to learn by doing and to earn as they learn. Where would youths get the capital they need? From their parents, of course. Most parents in the area can afford to part with one young hen or to purchase a pack of spinach seeds for 500 shillings for their children.

Youths will learn responsibility as they take care of their own hen, spinach patch or others. They will learn that they harvest what they sow, that perseverance and hard work pay off. They will feel a sense of accomplishment as they harvest spinach and collect eggs that are their very own and sell them. They would be encouraged to use part of their earned income, however small, to help their family to lighten their parent's burden, and to pour back the remainder into their business to make it grow. In that way, they will learn the value of sharing while learning the art of entrepreneurship.

Mwl. Marinja also encourages performing arts. He hopes to rekindle youths' interest and pride in their cultural heritage. Their skits touch on sensitive topics and carry messages about HIV AIDS prevention, overcoming the social stigma, compassion for those ailing with AIDS, corruption, violence against women and other social issues that affect their communities.

Youths are also sensitized to better husbanding of their environment. These clubs have already started to plant thousands of trees on Mount Kilimanjaro and youths are mobilizing themselves to keep their environment clean.

Bringing 4H clubs to Marangu were two years in the making. The final impetus for turning that into a reality came with the support from Mr. Alpha Moshi, Director, Executive Wilderness Programme at the Kinukamori Waterfalls and Ms. Tone Ellefsrud, Director, Kilimanjaro Children and Health Foundation, founded by Norwegian friends who have lived and worked in Marangu.

Hopefully, in other parts of Tanzania other sponsors will enable more 4H clubs to spring up, providing youths with opportunities to direct their energies constructively and to become engaged in their communities, learning through that that we make the society we live in.

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